

toni morrison wrote, in her 1993 nobel prize speech, that “language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. language alone is meditation...narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created.” i began this project with the desire of exploring the inscrutable self, created and creating—the racialized author and her body/text—which line the scopophilic corridor of the “confessional.” this reflective distortion appealed to me, as a writer influenced by fanon’s phenomenological practice (the “lived experience”), the feminist act of naming, and the minoritarian strategy of representation through personal exposure. all of these narrative traditions, arising from oppressed communities looking for means of discursive resistance, find their expression, in part, through the confessional, which brings audience and author in intimate consort through the first person. but i also began this project wary of the ways in which such confession, true or not, wrought a radical vulnerability upon the racially-marked speaker which, at best, turned her into an object of literary study, at worse, an ethnographic project, and often, both. there is much academic work done on the ways in which the privilege of the confessional—the privilege of individuality, as it were—is unafforded to the racially-marked author, whose autobiographical burden turns her *into* her text, and that text into a space of ethnic authenticity for the probing white gaze. so the question became not just how *i* could see *myself*, but how one might also protect the body of a racially-marked author—provisionally, my body—which is already vulnerable, inscrutable, and punished, from being further exploited on the page.

in other words, how can the racially-marked artist look at herself while surviving the distance of looking? how can she protect herself from the peril of being looked at through the wiles of circulation, especially the consumptive white gaze that threatens to turn her inscrutable body into an anthropological object, an unwilling confessor of her Interiority and Truth? recognizing that language is both meditation, as morrison says, but also mediation, i have devised a means of distorted seeing, which relies on a skewed chain of signification, so that author, speaker, text are made alienated and opaque, and the possibility of mapping narrative on autobiography, or inscrutability on the profundity of Interiority and Truth, are all but impossible. the result is a book about a book, in which the body of the speaker (and is it my body? or is the chain of signification so impossibly twisted that body/voice/author can no longer cohere as one?) is evacuated, leaving only an assemblage of possibilities tied together by a postmortem object—the chapbook, left behind by the deceased subject. this fetish object is less corpse than a deliberately-shaped cast, and together with the other documents, comprise the evidence of an existence that can only be known opaquely, mediated through voices several times removed. by framing narrative as last words (of the postmortem subject, S), mediated through the gaze of a narrative guardian (S’ editor/co-author/friend, another S), i sought to retain agency in last words, and a narrative obfuscation that refuses autopsy and the intimacy of complete knowledge. in fact, there is no body left, only scattered limbs (an epistolary collection of texts), from which the reader might glimpse a shadow of the woman S was, and come away with interpretations of what S might have been—a speculative memoir, which S might have endearingly called her personal mythology. as for me, this book is a way of shattering

the looking glass, and saving one cracked piece. ironically, inscrutability serves as both cause for political accusation and a literary defense. by dancing around an ontology of almost-there and not-quite-there-ness, it is as if i am saying, through the proxy of the S's, to the Reader: you decide whether to trust me, but either way, this is as much of me (and is it really me?) as you may know. you cannot weaponize your knowledge of me, as empirical knowledge (the knowledge of empire and its Truth) has consistently done to colonize its subjects. i am, fundamentally, not yours for the taking--and take me you cannot, even if you tried, for i--whatever "Real" me that ever was--am already gone.